

State's Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities

Goal 1: Improve earnings, benefits and career advancement for consumers served by SBVI.

- Strategy 1.1: SBVI will annually provide special employee recognition for counselors whose consumers obtain successful closures that are above SGA.
- Strategy 1.2: Increase incentives to job placement providers who place consumers in employment above SGA on an annual basis.
- Strategy 1.3: Develop and/or identify training resources to ensure counselors, consumers, and employers have ready access to ADA employment regulations pertaining to reasonable accommodations for individuals with visual impairments.
- Strategy 1.4: Annually complete a mail or phone survey of consumers closed successfully 3 and 5 years ago to measure career advancements, barriers, potential service needs, and strategies that worked for them.
- Strategy 1.5: Utilize benefits specialists who have received education on SSA blindness-specific provisions to educate beneficiaries on the SSA programs that are available including Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities. This education will increase beneficiaries' confidence in making informed decisions about their benefits and will ease their concerns about re-entering the workforce.
- Strategy 1.6: Develop early response procedures that address immediate needs of applicants and consumers who are employed but are in danger of losing their job.
- Strategy 1.7: Optimize consumer participation in post secondary to increase quality of outcomes and wages.
- Strategy 1.8: Ensure that a broad range of assistive technology services and devices are provided to consumers of SBVI at each stage of the rehabilitation process.

Goal 2: Increase the number of employers that are aware of vocational rehabilitation and the potential benefits of hiring individuals who are blind or visually impaired.

Strategy 2.1: SBVI will contact employers who have hired individuals with disabilities and collect testimonials from them in order to illustrate the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities.

Strategy 2.2: Counselors will distribute information to employers concerning SBVI services and incentives for hiring individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Information will include targeted tax credits, on the job training, and technical assistance on reasonable accommodations and assistive technology.

Strategy 2.3: Work with Department of Labor, employment agencies, career placement counselors on campuses, and participate in job fairs, and other community activities to provide information about the high quality candidates for employment among people with disabilities.

Strategy 2.4: Participate in activities with other components of the statewide workforce investment system to ensure optimal services for citizens who are blind or visually impaired.

Strategy 2.5: Promote employment opportunities and services by sponsoring and participating in activities that attract media attention.

Strategy 2.6: Promote the capabilities of individuals who are blind or visually impaired by submitting public interest stories about successful consumers to trade organizations and media outlets within South Dakota to publish.

Strategy 2.7: Develop ongoing relationships with targeted groups of major employers in each territory.

Goal 3: Provide individuals who are blind or visually impaired and have unique needs or are underserved with specialized services so they can fully access the benefits of vocational rehabilitation services.

- Strategy 3.1: Enhance counselors' skills and abilities to work effectively with individuals who have significant disabilities with specialized training in specific areas such as deaf-blindness, mental illness, developmental disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and diabetes.
- Strategy 3.2: Agency will actively work with cross disability organizations to educate them on the services that SBVI provides and to pursue common objectives to promote access to SBVI programs and services for individual with vision loss.
- Strategy 3.3: Analyze consumer data records to identify trends in secondary disability characteristics of consumers and address training for staff on service options and appropriate service delivery for the most prevalent secondary disabilities.
- Strategy 3.4: Work with individuals from minority backgrounds to recruit employees and identify barriers that prevent members of their communities from participating in SBVI programs.
- Strategy 3.5: Establish regular contacts on rural reservation areas to improve the SBVI presence in those communities and improve service collaboration between SBVI and the state's Native American Vocational Rehabilitation projects.
- Strategy 3.6: Provide the agency brochure and other resources in alternative formats including the preferred language of those requesting the information.
- Strategy 3.7: Implement training related to the needs of citizens who are blind for community rehabilitation programs that serve individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Access or develop providers of services in community rehabilitation programs for improved services to consumers who are blind or visually impaired.

Goal 4: Provide staff development initiatives and division policies designed to ensure the most effective delivery of services to consumers.

- Strategy 4.1: Develop a process by which SBVI will enlist the input of service providers to help determine the strengths and weaknesses of SBVI programs.
- Strategy 4.2: Whenever positions are vacant, complete an internal staffing review to determine if the distribution of FTE across the state and in offices reflects current work loads and consumer needs.
- Strategy 4.3: Evaluate whether there are delays in receiving services that adversely affecting equal access and comparable outcomes for individuals living in rural communities.
- Strategy 4.4: Increase the number of training opportunities that are specifically tailored to SBVI staff and address topics relevant to serving individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
- Strategy 4.5: Prioritize SBVI counselor activities, such as counselor staff meetings, case file reviews, and training sessions, that are designed to provide technical assistance and address counselor training needs.
- Strategy 4.6: SBVI will provide quality training to counselors in the area of job development to assist them in finding employment opportunities for consumers.

Goal 5: Implement strategies so that potential applicants will have improved access to information on SBVI programs and how to apply for SBVI services.

Strategy 5.1: The Division will develop materials and activities to educate the public on the services that our agency offers.

Strategy 5.2: The agency and counselors will annually conduct six in-service seminars and other outreach activities to the public or for other entities in underserved areas to educate them on the services available to individuals with visual impairments.

Strategy 5.3: Develop the SBVI internet website to improve quality and to allow for step-by-step instructions on how to apply for services.

Strategy 5.4: Create an outreach packet for eye care professionals in order to promote SBVI services to their patients.

Strategy 5.5: SBVI staff will conduct outreach on Native American reservations.

Strategy 5.6: Share program information with other organizations that work with people who are blind and visually impaired.

Strategy 5.7: Improve procedures to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who have been unserved and underserved by working with other components of the statewide workforce investment system as well as other potential referral sources (i.e. Social Services, Public Schools, Tribal organizations, Optometrists and Ophthalmologists).

Goal 6: Provide high quality services to transition age consumers that will result in those individuals making sensible, informed decisions regarding their transition to either work or post-secondary education.

Strategy 6.1: SBVI will promote a focus from obtaining a job to attaining the training required to obtain a career that matches with the consumer's potential and interests.

Strategy 6.2: 80% of all SBVI transition student will have had some form of integrated work experience in the community before graduation from high school.

Strategy 6.3: Develop a mentoring program that will connect each student with a successfully employed mentor within two years of graduation.

Goal 7: Provide SBVI consumers with high-quality rehabilitation technology services and the latest in assistive services and devices.

Strategy 7.1: Provide classes to consumers using updated versions of assistive technology software and devices.

Strategy 7.2: Provide guidance to ensure consumers have a plan in place before closure that will provide for needed software upgrades.

Strategy 7.3: Provide consumers with AT options to ensure that they are matched with the devices and/or software that are most appropriate for their needs.

Strategy 7.4: Emphasize the provision of assistive technology services and devices to transition age consumers.

Future Utilization of Innovation and Expansion Funds

Section 101 (a)(18) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended requires the State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency to reserve and use a portion of the funds for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities, with an emphasis on services to individuals with the most significant disabilities; and to support the funding of the State Rehabilitation Council (Board of SBVI).

The Division of Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired has reserved a budgeted amount for the utilization of the Innovation and Expansion. These funds will be used for the following activities:

- Support the costs of the Board of SBVI. This includes staff costs, accommodations and other direct costs involved in Board activities.
- Support initiatives approved by the Board of SBVI to expand and improve the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities, consistent with the findings of the statewide assessment and goals and priorities of the State.
- Areas of emphasis include the provision of assistive technology services and devices, improving community rehabilitation programs, and optimizing employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals served by SBVI.